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Current Opinion.

How the Teaching of Jesus Helps Us.

Dr. D. M. Ross, of Glasgow, at the close of his little volume on *The Teaching of Jesus*, records certain fundamental convictions in which his study of the subject has resulted. Because of their truth and usefulness, these convictions are here quoted:

From the teaching of Christ we learn what the life of man may be. There is kindled for us a new vision of God. Fellowship of the individual soul with the Father in heaven, and the love-inspired heart which is the fruit of such fellowship—in that is the hidden root of the tree of the Christian life. Its fruits are seen in childlike trust in God, in the manifold forms of love which are becoming in the members of a brotherhood, and in the temper of heroic hope.

It is toward life that the teaching of Christ looks. It is not a burden for the intellect, but a help for the spirit. As he himself said, his words 'are spirit and are life.' To be content to accept his doctrine on external authority, without pressing it into the service of our spiritual life, is to misinterpret the purpose for which all his words were spoken. That purpose is only achieved when the teaching lifts us into the spiritual experience in which it had its rise.

The teaching does not stand alone. It is illumined by its realization in the life of the Teacher. Not only so, but from spiritual fellowship with the Teacher there comes inspiration to live up to the ideals he has set before us. We miss the significance of Christ's personality in his own religion if we are content with the acceptance of definitions as to the nature of the God-man. His personality is help for life.

The Religion of Christ, as interpreted in his own words, could not but prompt Christian thinkers, from the days of the apostles onward, to relate it to the mental world of their generation. Not otherwise could it have done its work. But the acceptance of the results of such theologizing or philosophizing can be no substitute for the life to which Christ's teaching points. The life is of infinitely greater importance than a right understanding of the speculative questions, which the teaching may start.

It was inevitable that the Christian society, if it were to be an effective force in the world, should interest itself in methods of work, modes of ser-

vice, and forms of worship. The Christian society could not help developing itself as an organization—could not help becoming what we call a church. But if the church, in its engrossment with ecclesiastical and ritual questions, forget that it exists for the express purpose of fostering in its own members and in the manifold spheres of human activity the life of humility and love, of brotherhood and service, there is need of a return to the church's Teacher, that it may learn from him how to reform itself.

In the teaching of Christ there is ground for encouragement amid the theological and social upheaval of our own generation. The essence of Christianity is to be found, not in an external institution, nor in intellectual interpretations which have come down to us from the past with a record of worthy service, but in the personality of Jesus Christ, and in the life to which he is our Leader. Christ and his teaching are not for one intellectual atmosphere and one social outlook; they are for our own day as for the past generations.

Religion and Morality in the Public Schools.

The question of what can be done to infuse a religious and moral spirit, or possibly to introduce specific religious and moral instruction, into the public schools of America is receiving perhaps the best discussion ever given it. The addresses upon this subject at the recent Philadelphia Convention of the Religious Education Association, and papers at other conventions and in many publications, are bringing light into this obscure problem. The subject was ably discussed in a "National Conference on Secondary Education and Its Problems," held recently at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., of which the university now publishes a full report. In a paper by Professor George A. Coe, of Northwestern University, the opportunity and duty of the public school are thus stated:

The school must co-operate with home and church in respect to religion as well as in respect to the other elements of culture. The school may not be neutral or indifferent. A school that ignores religion, though the purpose be simply that of being neutral, cultivates a divided self in the pupil. It leaves the world of the school unrelated in his consciousness to the world of the home and the church. A prime end of education, the unification of the personality, is thus defeated. A school that develops a purely secular consciousness violates the whole principle of continuity in education; it represents in aggravated form the isolation of the school from life and from other educational agencies. It does more than that. For to develop a purely secular consciousness is not to remain neutral toward religion, but to oppose it by setting up a set of rival standards. In a word,

there is not, and there cannot be, a school that, in its influence upon its pupils, is neutral with respect to religion. In some way, then, our state schools must positively co-operate with home and church, else our educational system is no system at all, but only a truce between rival clans.

Continuity of impression can be attained without 'dragging in' religion, and without either catechising or preaching. For religion is a concrete and a pervasive fact. It meets us at every turn. It presses upon our attention as the atmosphere exerts its pressure on all sides. In the personal relations and the moral life of the school, in the study of literature, history, and nature, religious facts and points of view can be made impressive without once trying to prove the being of God or the truth of any dogma that is in dispute. It is more important for the state school to take religion for granted than to teach any proposition about it.

Thus much can be done and is done in schools from which the laws exclude all religious exercises, even the reading of the Bible. Where law and public opinion permit religious exercises, however, they can be made a power in character formation. From such exercises should be banished everything but such universally human ideas, emotions, and passages of Scripture as appeal to the common consciousness of the people. But these should be treated with such reverence and such spirit of deep conviction as prevents all impression of perfunctoriness and artificiality.

Parts of the Bible deserve not only to be read before the school, but also to be studied as masterpieces of literature. The study of literature, I take it, is not chiefly an analysis of grammatical or literary forms, but also an appreciation of human life as revealed in its records. He who properly studies a masterpiece of literature comes into its moral and spiritual atmosphere. Some of the psalms and proverbs, the beatitudes, some of the parables, the description of charity—these, studied merely as literature, without any touch of dogmatic interpretation, become a means of real spiritual culture. We already use other masterpieces of literature in precisely this way.

Religious culture through the atmosphere of the school, through assumption and incidental allusion rather than through formal instruction, requires that a religious tone should pervade the whole school. Every department and every teacher should sound the same note. Therefore, only persons who reverence God and show that reverence in their lives should be appointed to any teaching position. Let there be no discrimination against Catholic, Protestant, or Jew, but rigid discrimination against all candidates who are not likely to be a positive spiritual influence.

The Union of Science and Religion.

In Professor Francis G. Peabody's latest book, *The Religion of an Educated Man*, an interesting paragraph shows how we have passed beyond the period of strife between the natural and the theological sciences. He says: Fortunately for us all, this controversy between science and religion has had its day, and the pathetic history of superfluous antagonism and of misplaced loyalty now interests only a few belated materialists and a few overslept defenders of the faith. The chief privilege of a serious-minded young man who begins his mature life with the beginning of the twentieth century lies in the fact that he is not likely to be involved in this heart-breaking issue between his spiritual ideals and his scholarly aims. Philosophy, science and theology are all committed to the problem of unification. Nor has the issue of this momentous conflict been a truce, as though each party had withdrawn to its own territory and was guarding its frontier against hostile raids. Science and faith have discovered a common territory which they possess, not as rivals, but as allies. Faith has committed itself to scientific method; science has recognized that its work begins in faith. "The world of science," remarks one of the greatest of American philosophers, "is a world of faith. . . . The faith which is the basis of religion and theology is only the extension and completion of this faith that the universe is a perfect and organic whole." Thus the most alarming intellectual conflict of the last generation has already become of merely historical interest to the thought of today.

The Priestly Narratives of the Old Testament.

Professor Charles F. Kent, Ph.D., of Yale University, has made another valuable contribution to the popular study of the Bible in his new volume, *The Beginnings of Hebrew History*. The introduction to this volume is the most succinct, lucid, and informing account of the origin and characteristics of the legal books of the Old Testament that can anywhere be found.

The origin of the priestly narratives is stated thus: The half-century between 450 and 400 B. C. may be accepted as the approximate date when the majority of the priestly stories were collected and united; although it is obvious, as in the case of the other groups, that many individual traditions come from much earlier periods. Additions and minor emendations appear to have been made for a century longer, until the canon of the law gradually assumed its fixed and final form. The intense and fruitful activity of the prophets during the exile was equaled by that of the priests. For the

majority of those whose ancestors were carried to Babylon, the exile did not end until Nehemiah by his devoted patriotism rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and fundamentally reconstructed the Jewish community in Palestine, making possible the great reformation of 400 B. C., like that of Josiah two centuries before, sealed by the solemn acceptance of the regulations laid down in the new law book. That new law book, brought by Ezra from Babylonia, represented the adaptation of the older institutions, traceable to the age of Moses, to the entirely new conditions and conceptions introduced by the Babylonian exile. Like the authors of the Deuteronomic code, they also in time provided it with a historical introduction, which gave the traditional setting of the laws as a whole and their conceptions of the origin of the priestly institutions.

Poetry, thrilling narratives, and national achievement have no attractions for the priestly narrators. The monarchy of the Judean and the ideal theocracy of the Ephraimite prophets had each yielded their place to the hierocracy, which, in the days of Ezra and later, ceased to be a dream and became a reality. The chief purpose of the priestly writers was to trace the origin of the institutions that constituted the corner-stones of that hierocracy which they regarded, in common with later Judaism, as the goal and complete fulfilment of the divine purpose. The Babylonian exile severed the vital connection with Israel's past. At the same time, the harsh, unnatural conditions amidst which the Jews found themselves led them, unconsciously and inevitably, to idealize that past. They projected their ambitions and aspirations backward as well as forward. Like the author of the books of Chronicles, they also soon believed in all sincerity that the ceremonial institutions, which in their own day they cherished so dearly, originated at the beginning of their national history; although, if they had read their earlier records carefully, they would have been confronted with a vast array of proof that their customs and laws had unfolded gradually. Like most of the teachers of later Judaism, they were not, however, critical historians, but devoted lovers of the law and ritual. The traditions current in their day appealed to them far more strongly and were held to be more authoritative than the ancient prophetic narratives. The charge which Jesus brought against the apostles of the legalism in his day was that they treasured the traditions of the Fathers above the law of Moses. The exaggerations and inconsistencies, therefore, are but the natural result of the wide difference in time and point of view between the pre-exilic prophets and the post-exilic priests.

Still more fundamentally characteristic of the priestly narratives is their conception of the Deity. The primitive anthropomorphic expres-

sions are carefully avoided, for the fact that God is a spirit is never forgotten by these later Jewish theologians. At Sinai his glory, the reflection and symbol of his complete personality, appears; but it is veiled in a cloud and surrounded by impenetrable mystery (Exod. 16:10; Numb. 9:15-17). God is also conceived of as the omnipotent Ruler of the universe, whose fiat, as at the creation, is executed as soon as it is uttered. So prominent is this idea of Jehovah's omnipotence that the natural, mediating processes by which he ordinarily accomplishes his ends are almost entirely ignored. This fact, doubtless, in part explains why the supernatural figures so prominently in the priestly versions of Israel's traditions. The majestic doctrines of the priestly theologians sometimes led them far afield from the paths of reality marked out by the prophetic historians.